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Bristol Housing Festival: A Barrier-Busting Collaboration Promoting and Enabling Innovation in Housing Delivery for Inclusive Growth

Jeremy Sweetland

Summary

Bristol Housing Festival is a barrier-busting collaboration aimed at addressing the housing crisis by promoting and enabling innovation in housing delivery. Its vision is re-imagining better ways to live in our cities. Bristol Housing Festival is harnessing best practice and advanced technology to test and showcase better homes and city community living across Bristol. It brings together municipal authorities, government and innovative housing suppliers and creates conditions to prototype ideas, making it safer to “go first”. The Housing Festival is testing approaches that will lead to healthier, more resilient communities and the reduction of inequality within the city. The Housing Festival is addressing the bureaucratic inertia and the log-jam that results from very understandable caution in relation to risk that has contributed to the growth of the overall crisis in housing. Its outcomes will include a ‘*council change model*’ and a ‘*decision-support tool box*’, which will make it possible for the Housing Festival to share what works and replicate the solutions in other cities. The collaboration is also paying early attention to supply chain issues to facilitate future replication.

Keywords

Housing crisis; Innovative housing delivery; Healthy and resilient communities; Multi-partner collaborations; Prototyping policy and technological solutions; high Impact entrepreneurship

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Bristol Housing Festival: A Barrier-Busting Collaboration Promoting and Enabling Innovation in Housing Delivery for Inclusive Growth

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Problem discovered

The fact that the UK is in a housing crisis is well known, but the reasons for it are many and stretch back decades. Since 1981, the average number of new homes built per year has been just 151,000 - far below the number of new households forming alongside a flat-lining of the number of homes built for social or affordable rent in recent years. At the sharpest end of the crisis, rough sleeping in the UK has increased by 169% since 2010. At the same time, government subsidies for rent through housing benefit have tripled over a decade to around £25bn, and the average usable floor space per person has decreased.

Bristol, a city 464,000 people, is suffering at the acute end of the housing crisis. At the end of 2019, Bristol had nearly 12,000 households on the waiting list for public housing and over 500 households in temporary accommodation, of which 430 are families with children. In November 2018, 82 people were counted sleeping rough on our streets. Looking to the future, Bristol's population is predicted to increase by over 100,000 by 2039, adding to the housing need.

The intervention

There is no silver bullet to the complex housing challenges we face in Bristol. However, there is a significant moment in time where innovation in housing delivery (through Modern Methods of Construction/MMC and Off-Site Manufactured Housing/OSM), whilst still in its relative infancy in the UK, looks well placed to provide a new supply of housing as a way to address some of the challenges we face.

Through Housing Festival Limited we have created a powerful partnership with the City Council to host the Bristol Housing Festival, to offer a mechanism to '*find a way through*', and to create the right conditions to '*go first*'. This mechanism will help create prototypes and enable innovation that can be tested and, if successful, offer scalable and replicable solutions. We launched in October 2018 with an expo showcasing six real homes, new technology and good news stories for housing and community in Bristol. The purpose of the expo was to engage a wide audience (over 6,000 people came) including industry, public bodies and the general public, to help break down the communication silos between groups that exist in

housing and look to create shared vision and purpose. The expo also created visibility, support and momentum to launch the wider aims of the project, to support and enable delivery.

The Housing Festival team act as brokers on behalf of the city, seeking to create pathways to establish new ideas which are small scale in themselves but offer significant learning. The role is important to hold agreed values and vision whilst accepting that the end product will be owned by others, and to deliver and prove concepts which the market, left to its own devices, often struggles to establish.

The focus of the Housing Festival is not units of housing, but innovation and finding solutions for the challenges that cities face. We want to help create housing that promotes healthy and resilient community. The Housing Festival seeks to partner with community groups and those who ‘stay on’ once building is complete; those who ‘place-keep’ and help build and sustain the culture of a community.

Details of the impact

The ambition of the Festival was to use public events to drive real delivery. Below are a number of projects that demonstrate our progress so far and how the enabling role of the Festival is helping to drive real change. As a result of progress to date, the experience and learning we are able to share and the success of the Innovate UK bid set out below, opportunities are now being developed to support regional interventions (working with the West of England Combined Authority) and to feed into the national discussion via consultation and partnership working.

LaunchPad

Officially opened in October 2019, LaunchPad¹ is the product of collaboration between multiple stakeholders including United Communities (Housing Association) Bristol City Council. 1625 Independent People (charity supporting young people away from risk of homelessness) and Bristol University. It was shortlisted for the Insider South West Small Residential Development of the Year Award², and won the RICS Residential Social Impact Awards, 2020 and has therefore been nominated for the national awards³.

ZEDpods: Chalks Road

The ZEDpods is an environmental and socially focused development that will deliver much needed council housing for young people in need of affordable housing and those at risk of housing crisis by utilising air rights above an existing car park. The project has been in development since the launch expo in October 2018. The project represents multiple ‘firsts’ for many of the partners involved (completion expected July 2020). The ZEDpods

¹ <https://www.bristolhousingfestival.org.uk/projects/2019/3/22/launchpad>

² <https://www.insidermedia.com/event/insider-south-west-residential-property-awards-2020/coverage>

³ <https://www.rics.org/uk/training-events/rics-awards/rics-awards-southwest/>

development has won the Insider South West Social Housing Award⁴ and Inside Housing Development Awards 2019, Best Approach to Modular Construction⁵.

BoKlok: Airport Road

In October 2019, Bristol Council entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with BoKlok to work in partnership to deliver new homes on Airport Road⁶. This scheme (subject to planning) consists of 173 new homes to be built over 5 years (30% affordable) with provision of public open space, play areas and landscaping. It is anticipated that Airport Road would be one of the first schemes of its type in the UK.

Legal and General Modular: Bonnington Walk

Legal & General Modular Homes have been given permission to deliver over 180 new modular homes in Lockleaze on Bonnington Walk.⁷ The development will consist of 51% affordable homes (owned by the Council, both council housing and shared ownership). This will be one of the first major schemes for Legal & General Modular that adopts a unique collaboration for delivery with the City Council.

Innovate UK

In April 2020, Bristol City Council were awarded a £3 million Innovate UK grant for their bid, Enabling Housing Innovation for Inclusive Growth.⁸ The bid opportunity evolved out of the work being supported and enabled by the Housing Festival. By trialing new methods of house building, the project aims to improve the speed, cost and social value of nearly £78m of housing set to be built in the city over the next five years, some of which are detailed above.

The Innovate UK project aims to unlock the current barriers, enabling the council and its partners to examine how using MMC can help to cut the costs of housing production and increase the speed of delivery. The project outcomes include a '*council change model*' supported by a decision-support '*toolbox*', with the long-term ambition for those tools to enable other local authorities to address development challenges using MMC, addressing local issues, social value opportunities, specific development needs, and supply chain capacity.

About the organization

The Bristol Housing Festival was launched as a collaboration led by Housing Festival Ltd, the Shaftesbury Partnership (social purpose company), working with Bristol City Council and Bristol and Bath Regional Capital CIC based on an MoU between these the parties.

⁴ <https://www.insidermedia.com/event/insider-south-west-residential-property-awards-2020/coverage>

⁵ <https://www.insidehousing.co.uk/insight/insight/inside-housing-development-awards-2019--why-they-won-64562>

⁶ <https://www.bristolhousingfestival.org.uk/projects/2019/10/2/boklok-plans-for-200-homes-in-bristol>

⁷ <https://www.bristolhousingfestival.org.uk/projects/2020/3/10/180-modular-homes-on-bonnington-walk-lockleaze>

⁸ <https://thebristolmayor.com/2019/12/11/building-a-reputation-for-innovation/>

Initially the project was operated by Housing Festival Ltd on a full-time pro bono basis for 2 years – starting in June 2017 (investment circa £200k). The initial expo was underwritten by Bristol City, but all costs (save staff which were pro bono) were paid for by partners and sponsors. Since June 2019 a year's seed funding was secured from Bristol City Council and matched by the other key public body partner: the West of England Combined Authority. Understanding the importance of not relying on grant funding long-term, our ambition is that the Housing Festival will be a self-sustaining enterprise within three years through brokerage, consultancy and sponsorship fees.

About the leaders



JEZ SWEETLAND, PROJECT DIRECTOR and FOUNDER

An experienced leader, he has managed and initiated change and strategic development in a variety of settings, and has led both corporate and charitable organizations. He enjoys the challenge of setting and achieving a mission and affecting culture change through partnerships. He started his career as a solicitor in London.



JESSIE WILDE, DEPUTY PROJECT DIRECTOR

Jessie has a background in developing systems and operational processes, reporting processes, administration, and internal communications to support organizational growth. She has a wealth of event management and public relationship management skills and has developed partner and stakeholder engagements across industries regionally and nationally.

Sources to corroborate the impact

<https://www.bristolhousingfestival.org.uk/> Mayor's statement and multiple News items.

<https://news.bristol.gov.uk/news/bristol-partnership-secures-gbp-3m-to-unlock-housing-innovation>

<https://www.housingtoday.co.uk/news/landg-and-boklok-part-of-bristol-mmc-pilot/5106636.article> Details of the Innovate UK grant for the Enabling Housing Innovation for Inclusive Growth.

<https://www.offsitehub.co.uk/industry-news/news/bristol-a-home-for-offsite/> Journal dedicated to showcasing the latest and most exciting developments in off-site technology runs in depth feature on Bristol Housing Festival

<https://www.housingtoday.co.uk/in-focus/interview-jez-sweetland-bristol-housing-festival/5106520.article> Article in depth on Bristol Housing Festival as an initiative that “works from left of field, occupying neutral territory between council, developers, local groups and community... bringing all of them together to enable innovations in housebuilding and community resilience.”

<https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/shortlist-in-contest-for-brisstols-trinity-college-student-village-revealed/10047348.article> Example of the Housing Festival facilitating and promoting innovation.